IA Project Survey results produce few surprises

"Communication (via computers) at the Lab is like a patchwork quilt, but the seams are not always intact."

—Respondent to IA Project Survey

In March, the Laboratory's Information Architecture Project team conducted a survey to assess what computing, information and communications vehicles Laboratory employees are using today — and the results are in. Survey responses projected two major themes: (1) Laboratory employees use many kinds of computers and software packages, and (2) no absolute or de facto standards exist. However, there are a few favored computers and software packages throughout the Lab.

The IA Project, endorsed by the Laboratory Leadership Council, is a cross-divisional effort to replace the Lab's current electronic communication system, which has been described as a "patchwork quilt," with a cohesive integration of systems that provide seamless availability to all types of information.

The IA Metrics Team distributed 625 surveys to a representative sample of Lab employees and contractors selected randomly by job category. Survey percents represent the Lab workforce and have an error rate of plus or minus 8 percent. The Technical Staff Member, Specialist Staff Member, and Office Support/General Support job categories each provided about one fourth of the responses with Technicians making up 14 percent and contractors 12 percent.

The survey asked about desktop computers, operating systems, software, E-mail, the Internet, computer-support services, computer training, and satisfaction and importance of these tools and services.

In general, the survey results produced few surprises for the team. For example, survey percentages show the following: More than 99 percent of the Lab population uses a computer and 80 percent are networked in some way; 44 percent use Windows, 32 percent Macintoshes, 11 percent UNIX, and 8 percent DOS; and Microsoft Word is the most frequently used word-processing software (73 percent).

In addition, Eudora is the favorite E-mail tool, with 44 percent of the Lab population using it; All-in-One provides E-mail to about 25 percent, and about 85 percent are satisfied. More than 70 percent of computer users access the Internet, with most using either Mosaic or Gopher. However, the level of satisfaction is significantly higher among those who use Netscape. And while only 20 percent of those responding reach the Internet with Netscape, the satisfaction rate is doubled at 40 percent.

The results also show that an overwhelming 78 percent of the Laboratory population relies heavily on computer-support services within their own group or division and are more satisfied with in-house support services than with vendor support services.

The survey asked for written comments and E-mail received more comments than any other survey item. The most frequent comments were to "make E-mail more user friendly," "give more training or online help," "provide better address-locating capabilities," "provide a smoother interface with word processors," "have one E-mail system accessible to all" and "replace All-in-One E-mail."

Some general comments were: "I'm very unhappy with the print gateway," "It's encouraging to know someone is asking the customers

what they need and doing something about it," and "CIC and the Lab computing people as a whole seem to still focus on the old way of doing business."

How will the Information Architecture Project team use the survey results? One thrust of the project is establishing guidelines and standards in areas affecting information access and management. The IA Project team needed to know what is in use, what is important to users and the level of satisfaction before adopting standards and guidelines, thus the survey. The IA Project will now use the survey findings to establish a baseline for measuring improvements in Labwide computing and information sharing. Future surveys will help measure IA progress.

Additional information about the survey is available online via Gopher/World Wide Web under "Computing at LANL/Information Architecture Project/Related Articles, Reports, Projects." For printed or electronic mail copies of the survey results contact Diana Tuggle of Customer Service (CIC-6) at 7-8691 or *dst@lanl.gov* via E-mail.

If you would like to view or comment on proposed guidelines and standards, they also are available online through Gopher/World Wide Web under "Computing at LANL/Information Architecture Project/Proposed Guidelines, Standards, and Services" or contact Tad Lane in Communication Arts and Services (CIC-1) at 7-0886 or tad@lanl.gov via E-mail. To subscribe to the E-mail distribution list for notifications of new Requests for Comment, send the text 'subscribe info-arch@lanl.gov' to *listmanager@lanl.gov* via E-mail.

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